Superheroes

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/12768552.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
M/M

Fandom:
Supernatural

Relationship:
Dean Winchester/Original Male Character(s)

Characters:
Dean Winchester, Sam Winchester, John Winchester

Additional Tags:
Pre-Series, POV Outsider, John Winchester's A+ Parenting

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2017-11-19 Words: 3,876 Chapters: 1/1

Superheroes

by aeli_kindara

Summary

"I fuckin' hate group projects."

Dylan gives Dean a wary glance. He gets it — he’s not the biggest fan of these things himself. But when you’re a group of two, “I fuckin’ hate group projects” is awful close to “I fuckin’ hate working with you.”

In which a teenage Dean Winchester makes a friend and leaves something behind, and Sammy doesn't know when to shut up.

“I fuckin’ hate group projects.”

Dylan gives Dean a wary glance. He gets it — he’s not the biggest fan of these things himself. But when you’re a group of two, “I fuckin’ hate group projects” is awful close to “I fuckin’ hate working with you.”

As if he’s realized the same thing, Dean flashes him a quick smile. It’s a rare deviation from his habitual scowl, and for an instant, it takes Dylan’s breath away. “Nothing personal, man. I just got better shit to do, you know?”

Dylan swallows, finds his voice. “Well, we’ll just have to knock it out, then. When d’you wanna get together? I’ve got practice ‘til 5 most days, but I could do after that, or a Saturday or… somethin’.” He trails off, uncertain.

Dean’s lips are pursed, his gaze somewhere past Dylan’s shoulder as if he’s barely worthy of notice. “I can’t do Saturday,” he says.

“Evening, then? You could come over for dinner, my parents won’t mind.”

Dean shakes his head. “I gotta cook for Sammy. My kid brother,” he adds, as if in response to Dylan’s confusion, but he’s not even looking at him.

It takes Dylan a moment to work up the courage to say it. There’s a lot of other things he wants to say — *What about your parents?,* for instance — but what he says is, “He could come over too. My parents won’t mind.” God, he’s a broken record.

Dean’s focus snaps suddenly back to him. It’s almost more than Dylan can handle, those sharp green eyes intent on his face, and his breath catches in his chest. Dean seems to be looking right into him, weighing the offer, weighing his motives. His face twitches, and for a moment, Dylan thinks Dean’s about to punch him. Instead, he turns away, kicks at the dirt, and says, “Fine. Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” Dylan agrees, feeling dazed, and probably happier than he should be.

Dean paces around Dylan’s bedroom, looking for all the world like a

caged tiger. His brother, who's barely spoken a word since the two of them arrived, is installed at the coffee table in the living room, apparently content to bury his nose in algebra and shut out the world. Dean, by contrast, is all restless energy. Dylan can't help but feel horribly embarrassed by every bit of his life's detritus that Dean's eyes or fingers come to rest on before moving on. He pauses in front of the shelf of soccer trophies, and looks for a second like he's going to make some scathing comment.

Instead, he thrusts his hands into his jacket pockets — he hasn't taken that oversized leather jacket off since coming in the door, despite Dylan's mom offering more than once to hang it up in the closet — and says, "So, we doin' this, or what?"

They work on their poster for an hour or so. Once he's past the eye-rolling and the sarcastic remarks, Dean's actually a decent artist. Dylan sneaks looks at him as he works, eyebrows drawn just a little together, biting his lower lip.

"Hey, you're good," Dylan says, studying the half-finished portrait of James Madison. "You should be in art class, man."

Dean glances at him, a closed off look on his face. "I like shop," he says.

"Right," says Dylan. Then, feeling like he needs to explain himself, he adds, "I'm sorry, man, I don't mean for you to think I'm judging, or anything."

And in an instant, Dean's on his feet — not jerking backward, like Dylan would have expected, but stepping right up into his personal space, anger blazing in those green eyes. "And what the hell," he says, in a low voice, "would you have to judge me for?"

Dylan should answer. He should say something, only Dean is *right there*, blazing eyes level with Dylan's own, longer lashes than they should be for such a macho guy, sharp cheekbones and dusting of sandy freckles and that *mouth*, which Dylan has so far avoided looking at, lips too soft and way, way too expressive — Dylan's completely lost the plot more than once in class, just watching Dean's mouth. *Fuck*.

"Nothing," he says, quietly. "It was a stupid thing to say."

Dean doesn't move, but some of the fury seems to settle. Not to dissipate — Dylan gets the feeling it's still right there, ready to rear up

again at a moment's notice — but to stand down a little. Something about that gives Dylan a burst of reckless courage.

"I think you're awesome, man," he says, in a rush because he's not sure it'll come out at all otherwise. "Way too awesome to be hanging out with someone like me, if you didn't have to. So I'm getting nervous and saying stupid shit. I'm sorry, man." *Also, I have a giant crush on you,* he doesn't add. *And if you stand this close to me for ten more seconds I might just faint.*

To his relief — or maybe his disappointment? — Dean steps away, letting out a huff of breath. "What're you, gay or something?"

Dylan freezes.

Dean shoots him a sidelong look, then turns, raises his hands in peace. "Joke, man. Don't get your panties in a bunch. Let's get this bitch done, all right?"

They make good progress, after that. And Dean seems a little looser, a little happier. He's funny — makes jokes, does an impression of Madison, claps Dylan on the back and treats him like a friend. By the time they're ready to leave, he's smiling and saying "Thank you, Mrs. Prevost, dinner was great," pretty as you please. Then: "Come on, Sammy, you ready to go?"

The kid's already got his stuff in his backpack. He nods silent, looking up shyly from under long bangs. Then, quietly, he echoes, "Thank you, Mrs. Prevost."

Dylan's mom looks down on him fondly — like a lost puppy, Dylan thinks. "How are you boys getting home?" she asks, smiling.

Sam glances up at Dean, who doesn't seem to notice. "We'll just walk," he says, but his grin seems a little too wide. "Nice night for it."

For a moment, Dylan's mom looks caught between embarrassment and concern. The latter wins. "Why don't you call your mom to pick you up?" she presses. "I just pulled a tray of cookies out of the oven, you could have one while you wait." Dylan, who's used to his mom's regimented cookie rules (*they are for your lunch, young man, get your hands away from that tray!*), shoots her a look.

"We're all right, really, Mrs. Prevost," says Dean. At the same time,

Sam says, “We don’t have a mom.”

Both of them fall suddenly, abruptly silent. Dylan’s mom glances uncertainly between them.

“Well, we could call your dad then,” she says, coaxingly.

“He’s not here,” says Sam.

Dylan might have missed it, if he hadn’t been awkwardly trying to look anywhere but at Dean’s face. Dean has his hand on Sam’s shoulder, an affectionate gesture, but his fingers are digging in. Hard.

“Our dad travels for work,” Dean says smoothly, but his smile seems just a little forced. “It’s all right, really. We don’t mind the walk.”

Dylan can see it happening — his mom working herself into a fit of charitable insanity. She’s about to — offer to house them here, or something. Something that will make Dean fly off the handle. Or at least, something that will make him want to never see Dylan again.

“I can drive them,” he says, quickly. Glances at Dean, who’s turned to look at him. *Accept it,* he pleads silently. *If we don’t derail her, she’ll be — calling Child Protective Services, or something. Come on, man.*

Dean holds his gaze for a moment. Then, he grins again, and says, “Great! Thanks, man.” And before Sammy or Dylan’s mom can protest, the three of them are tumbling out the door and into the night.

Dylan drives his Dad’s old Jeep. The thing barely runs, definitely isn’t worth the money Dylan’s put into keeping it going, but Dean takes one look at it and says, “*Sweet* ride, man,” and Dylan suddenly feels seven feet tall. Sam shoves his backpack into the backseat and slides after it without a word, and Dean circles to take shotgun. Dylan laughs, and guns the engine. Reluctantly, it starts.

Dean talks his ear off the whole drive. Just the subject of cars seems to make him come alive — he’s quizzing Dylan about the work he’s done on the thing, talking with his hands, laughing. Mentions some work he did on his dad’s Impala, a couple months back, and Dylan lets out a jealous moan and says, “Your dad drives a ‘67 Impala? That is so *fucking* cool, man,” and Dean grins wide and says, “He’s giving it to me, when I turn eighteen,” and then, “Turn right here, man, yeah, this is it.”

It's the parking lot of a cheap motel, nearly outside of town. It would've been a long walk. Glancing around, Dylan sees it: long and black, gleaming under the streetlights. Fucking gorgeous. "Is that your dad's?" he asks excitedly, pointing.

There's a moment of utter silence. Then: "Shit," says Dean.

"He's home," says a small voice from the backseat. "D'you think something went wrong, Dean? Or maybe — maybe it went really well, and he's already —"

"Shut up, Sammy," says Dean, but it's mechanical, emotionless. Then, glancing back, he adds, more warmly, "Grab your bag. I'm sure it's fine."

He moves for the latch on his own door, and Dylan has a momentary fantasy of reaching for him, of asking, *Is everything okay?*, but he doesn't. Just watches as Dean slides out of the Jeep and strides around the hood, eyes on the Impala. When he gets to the driver side, he glances down briefly, claps his hand on the roof of the car. "Thanks for the ride, man," he says, and then he's striding away, his brother scurrying ahead of him.

There's no reason for Dylan to stay. But he can't help it; sits there for a minute in the parking lot, watching the two of them go. As they pass the hood of the car, a door opens, and light spills out into the parking lot. The guy silhouetted there is bearded and rough-looking, and there's something that looks like blood on his face. When he sees the boys, he strides forward.

Sam stops dead in his tracks. Dean doesn't — keeps moving, gets ahead of Sam, and then he's face to face with the guy, who grabs him roughly by the collar of his jacket. "Where the hell have you been, Dean," he growls.

"Sorry, sir," Dean replies immediately. "Working on a school project. Over at a fr — a classmate's house."

Dean's dad — that has to be who it is, though Dylan's never heard someone call their dad sir before — studies him for a moment, then glances over at Dylan's car. "Get inside," he says, releasing his hold on his son's coat. "And see what you can scare up for dinner. I'm starving."

"Yes, sir," says Dean, automatic precision in his voice, and Sam follows him inside, backpack hanging half off his shoulders. Dean's

dad gives Dylan's car one more searching look before he follows them into the room.

The next day in school, Dean looks — happy.

He's practically glowing with it, actually. Dylan catches girls noticing, staring. Girls Dean would've flirted with shamelessly yesterday. Today, he seems oblivious.

"Hey, man," he says in an undertone, reaching to put a hand on Dylan's arm in History. "I have to miss that presentation tomorrow. I'm sorry. You can tell her you did all the work. I'll tell her myself, if you like."

Dylan stares. "But you did plenty of work. Besides, she'll fail you, if you say that."

Dean shoots him a grin. "Whatever, man. I don't care about that stuff."

"But —" Dylan stops himself from saying whatever it was he was going to say. *But it's your future. But you deserve it. But…*

"I'm just going into the family business anyway," Dean elaborates, releasing Dylan's arm. "My grades don't really matter, y'know?"

"Sure," says Dylan.

"That's why I won't be here tomorrow," Dean adds, in a confiding tone. "Helping my dad with a job." He looks excited — like a little kid before Christmas. But before Dylan can ask anything more, Mrs. Aldous is entering the room, and the class is coming to attention.

"He did a lot of it," Dylan says. "I can't draw like that."

Mrs. Aldous purses her lips. "Dean's father pulled him out of school, you said?"

Dylan nods.

"Well, he didn't clear it with the front office. It's on the books as an unexcused absence. We generally don't give credit for assignments missed without an excused absence," Mrs. Aldous continues, severely.

Dylan's heart squeezes. "Please," he says. "They've only lived here for a few weeks, I don't think Dean's dad knows about the whole — excused absence thing. He played a really big part in making the poster," he adds. "Did a lot of the research, too."

Mrs. Aldous softens, just an iota. "All right," she says. "This once."

Dylan grins.

"So what does your dad do, anyway?"

They're leaning against the back of the school, and Dylan's feeling a little light-headed. It's Monday, and Dean's back in school, grinning like the Cheshire cat and trying to hide a limp. Or, more accurately, they're skipping school, both of them, because Dean leaned over and said, *Hey, got some weed, wanna skip gym?* And Dylan, idiot that he is, couldn't say no, and here they are.

Dean gives him a sidelong, lazy look. "Plumbing," he says.

"And you —" Dylan gestures at him — "fell out a window, helping with the plumbing."

Dean laughs, low and amused, like he's got his own private joke. "It's a dangerous job, plumbing," he says.

"I'm sure." Dylan takes another drag of his joint. Goddamn. He's been high before, but not like this — not lazy in the sun on a September afternoon. Not just him and Dean.

"Thanks for sweet-talking Aldous," says Dean, suddenly. "Not that it matters, I mean. But thanks."

Dylan turns to look at him. "No problem."

The silence stretches between them, lazy and comfortable. Dylan is high. Dean is high. The sun is so freaking golden.

"Can I tell you a secret?" says Dean.

"Shoot," Dylan replies.

Dean sighs like a happy cat, settling back against the wall. "My dad's not really a plumber." He holds the joint out to Dylan.

Dylan takes it, not thinking — *not* thinking — about how Dean's lips were just on this thing, about how close he is to touching them with his own. "What is he, then?"

"He's a —" Dean laughs. "He's a fucking superhero, man. Finds people in trouble, and —" He snaps his fingers. "Saves them. From things you wouldn't even *believe*."

"What, like a vigilante?"

Dean seems to ponder this. "Kinda," he says. "Yeah."

"I buy it," Dylan says after a moment of consideration. "You could be a superhero."

Dean laughs, slinging an arm around Dylan. "You're all right, man. Almost wish I wasn't gonna never see you again, once we bust outta here in a week or two." Dylan's drug-hazed mind hasn't fully processed this when Dean adds, "What about you? Got any secrets?"

Dylan laughs, the words *Nah, man, just a regular white bread kid with a handful of soccer trophies* forming in his head, but what comes out of his mouth, "Remember what you asked me the other day?"

"What, how you rebuilt your own carburetor? Don't tell me that was a lie, man."

"Nah," says Dylan, and for some reason he's not anxious, it's not the big deal he always thought it would be, it's simple, and he just says, "when you asked if I was gay or somethin'."

There's a beat, just a beat, of silence. Then Dean says, "Shit, man. You are?"

"Or somethin'," Dylan mumbles, waiting for the gut-clenching rush of terror. It doesn't come.

Dean claps him on the shoulder. "Well, good for you, dude. Got anything goin' on? Some smokin' dude you haven't introduced me to?"

Dylan laughs. "Nah. Nothing goin' on."

"And?" Dean prods him. "Who do you *wish* it was goin' on with?"

Dylan laughs again, tipping his head to the sky. "No one I've got a shot with."

“Come on,” says Dean, grinning. “Give it up. There’s a guy. *Tell.*”

Dylan glares at him. “Everyone ever tell you turn into an incorrigible gossip when you’re high?”

“Everyone ever tell you that if you can still use a fucking SAT word, you’re not high enough?” Dean counters. “C’mon. You’ve got to at least have a type. What is it? Blondes? Nerds? Jocks? Theater kids?”

He’s got this shit-eating grin on, so fucking happy, and right up in Dylan’s face, and Dylan doesn’t really plan it, just lets out this little self-conscious laugh and says, “Well, I guess I’ve kinda got a thing for superheroes.”

There are times, later in his life, when Dylan will wonder if that afternoon was a dream. If Dean Winchester was a dream — some imaginary friend his hormone-addled teenage brain invented. The friends he’s asked don’t remember the Winchester kid at all. But Dylan doesn’t think he could have made it up — that long, evaluating look, as if Dean hadn’t considered this possibility before, and intended to take his time turning it over in his mind; that slow lean forward, sun golden on hair and freckles and skin, green eyes so close — that first touch of lips.

It’s the kind of fall day that lives in high school memories everywhere. The first few leaves are tangled in the lawn; the sun is bright and close enough to confide in, warming the air on your skin and the brick wall at your back. A breath of breeze or a passing cloud, and you’re shivering, but when someone’s hand slips under your shirt, when it rucks up over their wrist and exposes your hipbones and just an inch or two of skin, the cold feels like a kiss, a promise.

At first, it’s like Dylan’s paralyzed, too shocked to really understand what’s happening, never mind participate. Dean’s mouth is gentle on his, though — and soft, Jesus, Dylan’s lips have never been that soft — and without really thinking, he’s responding, lips parting, searching to understand this new rhythm. He doesn’t know what to do with his hands — surely they shouldn’t just lie useless in the grass. He manages to raise one to Dean’s bicep and lock it there, a tight, nerveless grip.

Dean draws back, but only a few inches. His face is serious, eyes studying Dylan’s. “Yeah?” he says, and his voice cracks, just a little, but it gives Dylan the courage he needs.

“Yeah,” he says, and closes the distance between them.

Dean’s not in school the next day.

Dylan doesn’t think much of it, at first. It’s not like Dean places much stock in his attendance record; he’ll probably show up by third period. But the day wears on, and Dean doesn’t appear.

After soccer practice, Dylan drives out past the strip malls and the Applebee’s to Dean’s motel, Jeep rattling like something possessed.

The Impala’s not in the parking lot, but that means nothing, Dylan tells himself. He parks in one of the center spaces and cautiously approaches room 23.

He’s still a little terrified of Dean’s dad, even if the car’s absence means he’s almost certainly gone too. But when he knocks on the door, there’s no sound from inside, no voices, no muffled TV. Behind the curtain, the lights are off.

The man at the front desk is in his 60s and balding, with square glasses and a kind look about him. He’s reading the paper when Dylan comes in, but folds it up immediately with a smile.

“Hi,” says Dylan, uncertainly. “I’m, um — looking for my friend. He was staying in room 23, I think.”

The man’s brow furrows. “Winchester?” he asks.

Dylan fidgets. “Yes, sir.”

“Checked out this morning. In a hurry, I’d say. Dad and the older boy were practically spitting at each other — something about a job in Utah.”

Utah. The word drops like a lead weight into Dylan’s stomach. It’s stupid — he knows it’s stupid — but for a moment he’s struggling not to cry.

The man’s expression softens. “Estrella found this when she was cleaning out their room,” he says kindly, turning in his chair to open a drawer. “If you’d like it?”

It’s a faded Batman comic book, pages much-thumbed. For a moment, Dylan just stares at it. Then, urgently, he flips through it, looking for

— something, a note, a slip of paper. One of the pages tears, just slightly, under his thumb. But there's nothing inside.

"It had fallen behind the bed," says the man, watching him. There's sympathy in his eyes.

"Thank you," Dylan manages. He tucks the comic book under his arm. "I — thank you."

It's probably Sammy's, he tells himself. Just an errant bit of life's detritus, forgotten like another nameless town. Maybe he was reading it in bed; maybe it slipped off the mattress while he slept.

Still. Maybe it isn't.

Maybe, one day, Dylan will be standing in line at his favorite Main Street coffee shop and hear the rumble — the purr — of an engine from a block or more away. (Fine engines age like fine wine, he'll tell Eric. Eric will laugh and know he's an idiot and love him anyway, and they'll both be distracted when Rose's flailing baby fist finds the zipper on Dylan's coat and she determines that her life's best and highest purpose is to get it in her mouth.)

Maybe the gleaming black car will catch his eye as it rolls down the street; maybe they'll both be too distracted. Maybe everyone in the shop will already be tense, worrying, and not speaking, about the disappearances — the Coleman boy, and now Shannon Hsu. Maybe the mothers will be standing closer to their daughters than usual. Maybe they won't.

Maybe the man at the wheel will have his brother beside him, unrecognizable as the skinny 13-year-old Dylan might remember. Maybe he'll be alone. Maybe he'll carry death in his eyes, or else an unnameable grief, or maybe even a measure of peace.

Maybe they'll see each other — then, or the next day, at a gas station counter or outside the public library. They might even recognize each other; they might even speak.

They probably won't, though. It doesn't much matter. Either way, a few years later, when Rose gets scared of the monster under her bed, Dylan will know what to do.

He'll tuck a faded old Batman comic under her pillow, then kiss her

forehead, smoothing back her hair. And he'll tell her that superheroes are real. That you might never see them — *you'll have to be very lucky,* he'll tell her sternly, *and very kind* — but that they're out there anyway, beating back the darkness, one nightmare at a time. That superheroes simply don't let children get eaten by monsters. That she has nothing to fear.

Did you ever meet one, Daddy? she'll ask, already half asleep.

Once, he'll whisper, and smile.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!